

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service and in particular with the Congregational Bible passage.

Week beginning Sunday 3 September 2017

Place for Peace

Pray Thank God that he sent his Son to be the means of bringing peace and reconciliation to the world in the deepest sense possible. Pray that we might be open to know the Prince of Peace in fullest measure and be used to share that peace with others.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Matthew 18:15-20.
Background This is a very short passage which focusses particularly on how to resolve serious disputes between believers (not just simple differences of opinion – sin) in a way that gives due weight to the offending but deals with things in a way that is true to Christian principles of grace and forgiveness. It is important to see that it is the relationships between believers and between believers and God that is seen to be paramount. That should not, however, mean that the seriousness and import of wrongdoing is downplayed or ignored. Since the passage is short but the issues significant feel free to consider other passages (esp sayings of Jesus) that might shed more light on Christian conflict and resolution.

Possible questions/points to consider

1. The history of the Church is littered with conflicts between Christian groups and among believers. Why do you think this is? How far should you go (be allowed to go) when you believe something is really important? Where do you draw the line? Where would Jesus draw the line?
2. Many people in the Church don't like to think about conflict among believers and would prefer to sweep things under the carpet. Can you think of examples? What damage results? Jesus highlights the importance of trying to put things right. "If you hide problems or ignore them they will never get sorted out". How do you respond to that comment?
3. Jesus says if your brother(sister) sins against you go them privately.... What are the advantages of speaking privately? What are the dangers of shouting things "from the rooftops"? What is the aim of the approach? Have you ever been surprised at the positive reaction someone has had? Of course, we have to be ready for others to speak to us – how should we react? It can be easier to fix a problem while it is still relatively small scale – why do things become more problematic when they escalate?
4. "Sinning against you" doesn't simply mean that they do things differently to you. We have to leave room for different approaches, personalities, preferences etc. Someone has suggested that Jesus encourages us to deal with conflict and disagreement at the lowest level possible. Obviously, if someone is attacking you with a hammer or a knife then it is perfectly OK to run away/phone the police. But sometimes when we disagree/fall out with someone the temptation is to make more of it, to get others on "our side" and it becomes very difficult to see any good in the other person. Why is it a good thing to involve an outsider if a dispute becomes protracted or escalates? What are the benefits of mediation?
5. There are a lot of slanging matches in the world just now. Why is it easier to talk (shout) at someone than to listen to them? The point of these verses is to encourage Christians to work to resolve differences. Reconciliation and fellowship is as important to Jesus as who is right. What does this have to say to us? to the Church as a whole?
6. "You can be right in the wrong way – and it will do you no good". What does Jesus' teaching tell us about the importance of going about things in the right way? Treating the other person well, even if we firmly believe them to be wrong/mistaken is important. Examples?

Prayer Lord help us to be more interested in seeking for restored relationships than just being right. Help us to be gracious in both speaking and listening. Amen.